

March 15, 2008

Subject: Concerns regarding limitations on shore-based recreational fishing

To the North Central Coast Stakeholders, Science Advisory Team and other interested parties:

As a third generation resident of San Mateo County and a professional conservationist, I am writing to state my tremendous support for the Marine Protected Act and the goals of the program. I appreciate the thoughtful, painstaking public process that has been adopted to make important decisions regarding which areas are to be closed and why.

However, I am alarmed and disappointed that the process has been stretched to include shore-based non-commercial recreational fishing in a number of areas. Elimination of this activity does not appear to be science-based or well justified, thereby undermining the credibility of the process. It also does not appear to be linked to a specific resource goal or address an identified threat. However, closing areas to such low impact fishing **will** have the following

UNNECESSARY effects:

1. It will disrupt multi-generational relationships between people and the ocean and reduce opportunities to teach proper resource stewardship to our children,
2. It will limit local recreational opportunities, forcing fishermen to drive out of the area or crowd into remaining open fishing areas,
3. It will reduce sympathetic 'eyes and ears' in the field who report poachers, pollution and other problems to local wardens,
4. It will impact coastal communities economically, and
5. In the case of State Marine Reserves, it trades an adaptive, 'screw-driver' style management tool -- existing Fish and Game regulations and limits -- for a baseball bat: complete closure.

### **Coastal Shore-Based Fishing -- Striped Bass**

There is also a possibility that this action could be counter-productive to the recovery goals of the MLPA. Specifically, what recovery purpose is served by limiting non-commercial 'hook and line' striped bass fishing, one of the most common types of coastal shore-based fishing on the Central Coast? Striped bass are voracious non-native predators that devour surf smelt, juvenile perch and other native species throughout much of the year. In the past 2-3 years, schools of striped bass have also been observed moving into coastal estuaries and predating on juvenile salmonids (based on personal experience, as well as per communications with DFG fishery biologists who have observed this in Pajaro and Pescadero Lagoons).

Current DFG regulations allow fishermen to take two adult striped bass per day, and there is a lively multi-generational, multi-ethnic community of local men and women who spend every hour they can in the summer and fall chasing these fish. Because so much of the Central Coast is already effectively closed to shore-based fishing due to difficult, rocky terrain and/or private property, and because the schools of bass move up and down the coast according to prey availability, closing even relatively small areas that include traditional, accessible striper-fishing beaches has a big impact. The last MPA process resulted in total closures of several important fishing locations (including Wadell and Gazos Beaches). The current San Gregorio State Marine Reserve (SMR) proposal would eliminate shore-based recreational fishing on a ~3-mile long

complex of sandy beaches, representing one of the areas of highest concentration of striped bass on the San Mateo County coast, according to some long-time local striper fishermen. Cumulatively, these closures represent a significant reduction in striped bass fishing opportunities in coastal San Mateo County.

### **Pescadero Lagoon – Catch and Release**

My other serious concern is the focus of some stakeholder sub-committees on catch and release fishing in Pescadero Lagoon. I have not heard any science-based justification for closing down this activity, as will occur if the Lagoon is designated a SMR. As far as I can tell, this is the ONLY effect such a SMR designation would have in Pescadero. The only reason I have heard expressed by a few stakeholder representatives is an overall disapproval of catch and release fishing for steelhead. Yet, this issue has not been raised on other coastal lagoons considered for MPA designation up and down the coast. To close Pescadero Lagoon to fishing on such a weak ‘justification’ appears arbitrary and undermines the credibility of the MPA process, and may stiffen opposition as the process moves north. The catch and release fishing activities at Pescadero Lagoon (and elsewhere on the coast) have a very limited season and significant restrictions on the type of gear use. Adoption of these restrictions is noted in the NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-NWFSC-66, “Updated Status of Federally Listed ESUs of West Coast Salmon and Steelhead,” as reducing threats to steelhead populations in both the North Coast and Central Coast (Eric P. Bjorkstedt, et al, June 2005). According to the DFG website, the Steelhead Fishing Report-Restoration Card program is the only long-term funding source dedicated to steelhead in California. Steelhead anglers are required to purchase and complete the report card, providing important data used by DFG to analyze catch and population trends. No data has been brought forward by DFG or through the MPA process (as far as I can tell) that demonstrates that catch and release fishing has a significant effect on steelhead populations. The clear threats to steelhead populations are impacts to watershed health and habitat quality. The steelhead fishermen and women of Pescadero Lagoon have dedicated considerable time and funding to fishery enhancement projects throughout the watershed. Having a diverse, deeply committed group of locals advocating for watershed restoration in this rural area of San Mateo County is tremendously valuable to regional conservation efforts; they should not be ‘rewarded’ by being singled out and punished for an activity regarded by most as a sustainable and appropriate interaction with the resource.

I urge you to take the time to apply the thoughtful, creative effort I know this process is capable of to avoid these unnecessary and divisive potential impacts of the proposed SMR designations in San Mateo County. The argument ‘continuing to allow shore-based fishing is too complicated or hard to enforce’ is not persuasive. This process and its outcome deserves to be science-based, rational and measured. It would be a shame to see a public ‘backlash’ if, upon implementation, people discover their traditional recreational opportunities have been lost without solid scientific justification.

My sincere thanks for the hard work all of you are putting into this historic and critical effort.

With Regards,

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